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February 28, 2008

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Council Making Progress on SFC Plans



Please note that our next Real Estate Committee meeting will be held Tuesday, March 4 at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers as we continue efforts to review [SFC's](#) downtown plans and work on the [Demolition Review Ordinance](#).

The meeting will feature information from the City Council's consultants who have been reviewing the re-submitted [Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) (pDEIS) that SFC delivered, in part, on February 5, 2008 and in its entirety on February TK.

The lead agency will diligently review this latest pDEIS to determine the completeness and adequacy of the document with respect to its scope and content for the purpose of commencing public review.

As you may know, the lead agency has directed its consultants to make themselves available to meet with the SFC team as long and as often as it will take to get the document ready for acceptance. They will report back to us at the March 4th meeting which put us one step closer to completing the process.

To read more, click [here](#) to read the latest Journal News article.

In related real estate news, the Demolition Review Ordinance continues to be improved as the Council receives input and comments from the community, landmarks preservation board, and the Mayor.

The proposed ordinance calls for a Landmarks Board review any time a demolition permit is filed for a building at least 75 years old to protect the city's architecturally significant

structures such as the Smith- Collins house that was razed in favor of new development last summer.

Some of you may have read Tuesday's cover story in the [Journal News](#) in which the Mayor cautioned people against the ordinance, saying it was far- reaching and that it could affect "even your home."

This is simply not the case. Just because you may live in an older home does not mean it would qualify as potentially historic. It would have to have true historic value, like 575 N. Broadway, an incredible example of craftsmanship built by a famous architect, [Wilson-Eyre](#). The Council recently landmarked the estate following intense public outcry over a developer's plan to tear it down to build five new houses.

The passage of the Demolition Review Ordinance will help ensure that the city moves forward with strong development projects while we preserve such treasured relics of our past.

Save up for Sunday



Several years ago, I received one of those calls that everyone dreads. My little cousin, Eric Tuckman, had been diagnosed with cancer. He was not yet 5 years old.

My wife, Beth, and I were devastated, and tried our best to support the family by spending time at the [Ronald McDonald House](#) near [Memo rial Sloan-Kettering](#) where he was undergoing treatment.

Fortunately, the neuroblastoma was eradicated with surgery. There was no need for chemotherapy or radiation. Eric was back at 'em on the ball fields in under a year.

Now that he is 11, Eric has a deeper understanding of what it means to be a cancer survivor. It is also an experience I will never forget.

This year, Eric and I will raise money to help fund research to conquer kids' cancer by shaving our heads on Sunday, March 2 for the [St. Baldrick's Foundation](#), the world's largest volunteer fundraising event for childhood cancer research. Only Eric will do it in Setauket, Long Island where he is from, and I will do it here in Yonkers at the [Police Athletic League's](#) charity concert, featuring the wildly popular Irish rock band, [Black 47](#), starting at 2 p.m. on 127 N. Broadway. But first is Yonkers' 53rd annual [St. Patrick's Day Parade](#) starting at 1:30 p.m. at Radford St. heading down Broadway.

My goal is to raise \$1,000, in addition to my own contributions. If anyone would like to sponsor me, please call or email.

Here at City Hall, we started celebrating early, ringing in the parade with the Council's Irish- American reception on Tuesday. The annual event features not only members of the parade committee, but lots of Irish Coffee, desserts and other treats followed by a formal ceremony in the Council Chambers.

(A very special thanks to Carol Bengis and Dwanita Crosby from my office who organized and worked the event. And to [Rory Dolan's](#) for the catering.)

New York Conference of Mayors

Earlier this week, I addressed the [New York Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials](#) (NYCOM) on a panel discussion on tax increment financing (TIF) and historic tax credits at their annual legislative conference in Albany.



NYCOM and I asked the state to improve its legislation and to expand the program to include more communities. The City Council is currently reviewing the \$160 million TIF proposal for roads, sewers and other infrastructure for the \$3.1 billion [SFC](#) project in the Yonkers Waterfront Downtown.

TIFs work better in cities like Yonkers with dependent school districts. They are far less effective in areas of the state where the school district is a separate taxing authority.

To that end, I provided background on the dynamics of the Yonkers TIF project while Brian McMahon, executive director of NYS Economic Development Council, urged NYCOM's mayors to support efforts to create a mechanism for participation of local school districts.

TIF is a financing tool that uses future taxes to fund current development. When a public project such as SFC needs to build roads or add sewers, there is an increase in the value of surrounding real estate. This increases site value and investment increases tax revenues. This tax increment finances debt to pay for development projects, especially in underdeveloped areas where development would not necessarily otherwise occur.

The second part of the talks were with Daniel McKay, director of public policy for the [Preservation League of New York State](#). We spoke about New York State's historic tax credit program, created by the Legislature last year. The program includes a residential tax credit for 20% of rehabilitation expenses by owner occupants to properties on the national register in federally distressed census tracts.

There are only five such census tracts in Westchester and the four in Yonkers do not coincide with any national historic districts. NYCOM supports the efforts of the Preservation League to expand the eligibility criteria to include more areas and greater reimbursements.

The state's effort was a good first step but it needs to be expanded to have any impact in Yonkers.

Yonkers Mayor Philip Amicone spoke about using and improving the State Brownfields Program. Our [Yonkers Brownfields Economic Redevelopment](#) Initiative (YBERI) gives developers access to funds to support the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields-

abandoned business properties that are difficult to redevelop because of real or perceived concerns about contamination.

As Treasurer of the Westchester Municipal Officials Association, I joined fellow municipal officials who met with the Westchester Legislative Delegation to support flood mitigation relief, increase municipal aide for "non-distressed cities" like Yonkers and allow for local traffic improvements.

While there, I also finalized plans to bring the entire City Council back in mid-March to further lobby for state funding and Yonkers' legislative priorities.

Photo: The Westchester Delegation to the New York Conference of Mayors included (from left to right) Rye Mayor Steve Otis, White Plains Mayor Joseph Delfino, Yonkers Mayor Philip Amicone, Mamaroneck Supervisor Valerie O'Keeffe, Tarrytown Mayor Drew Fixell, WMOA Executive Director Anne Janiak, Bronxville Village Administrator Harold Porr, Croton Village Treasurer Abraham Zambrano, Croton Village Manager Richard Herbek, Yonkers Council President Chuck Lesnick and NYS Deputy Secretary of State Robert Elliott.

PEARLS Goes to Albany



The Council is heading to Albany to lobby for more education funding at the same time that a bus full of choir students from [PEARLS](#), a Yonkers Public School for the gifted and talented, will sing at the [Empire State Plaza](#).

The PEARLS A Cappella Choir, conducted by Emme Kresek, will perform the program that earned them the [New York State School Music Association \(NYSSMA\)](#) rating of "Gold with Distinction-Level III" along with other pieces from their multi-national repertoire from 12:10 to 12:40 p.m. on

Wednesday, March 12.

They will be singing in seven languages accompanied by concert pianist, Renee Harris, who also happens to be a PEARLS parent.

It's all part of the NYSSMA 35th annual celebration of "Music in Our Schools Month."

This year, 85 bands, orchestras and choruses totaling 3,000 students have been selected to perform.

As an aside, both my children attended PEARLS and were in the choir. Emily became choir president in 5th grade and is now singing with the female A Cappella group, the Sirens, at Macalester College. PEARLS has a wonderful choir program and I look forward to the performance.

If anyone wants to join in, the bus will leave PEARLS at 8:15 a.m. and arrive back in the mid-afternoon. Please contact Emme Kresek for more information, 914-376-8250. Or if you are in the Albany area, please come to hear this amazing group of children who have brought so many honors to our city.

Dollars for Scholars

WRS OF YOU.

Attention graduating high school seniors. The Hispanic Heritage Foundation is offering college education grants totaling nearly half of a million dollars in 12 regions throughout the country, including New York.

Award categories include Business, Education (future teachers), Engineering and Mathematics, Journalism, Leadership, and Sports. Students are chosen by regional selection committees based on their academic achievement, community service, category focus, and short written statements. The deadline is March 14, 2008. Click [here](#) or contact Hispanic Heritage Foundation 2600 Virginia Ave. NW, Suite 406 Washington, DC 20037. Or call 202-861-9797.

Landmarks Board Votes Unanimously to Save Historic Block



Deliberations regarding the Philipse Manor Square Historic District raise many complicated issues.

Proponents of the landmarking point to 13 buildings in various architectural styles from about 1860 to 1900 that they say should be preserved, not demolished.

They also cite possible potential damage to the neighboring [Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site](#) should construction be approved.

Then you have the Greyston Foundation, which is known for restoring historic areas, even when they were only economically feasible with heavy subsidy.

After the Landmarks Board on Tuesday [voted unanimously](#) to keep the district intact, the Council Real Estate Committee will now have to take a hard look at the costs and benefits of adoptive re-use of some or all of the property.

The Real Estate committee meeting will be held at City Hall on Tuesday, March 4th at 7 p.m. As soon as we get the transcripts from the Landmarks Board, they will be posted on the [City's website](#).

You may also want to read the [Journal News](#) coverage.

Go Wild. Give Blood.

The Bronx Zoo is offering two free entry tickets to blood donors this Thursday, March 6, 2008 at the Peter Chema Center located at 435 Riverdale Ave, Yonkers from 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Please bring ID/and know your Soc.Sec. #

Further information contact Dawn @ 914-377-6294.



Celebrating 164 Years of Dios, Patria y Liberta



Wednesday marked Independence Day in the Dominican Republic.

Here in Yonkers, residents observed the day with a 4:30 p.m. flag-raising ceremony and reception at City Hall.

The event was hosted by the Dominican Cultural Association of Yonkers who honored local Dominican- Americans, including Nellys Cruz-Innabi, Rosario Alba, Plinio Batista and Francisco Estevez.

Here, students dressed in traditional Dominican festival clothing, accept proclamations on behalf of their parents.

Dominican-Americans are the second-largest Hispanic group in Yonkers. In 2000 the U.S. Census counted 7,838 Dominican-Americans, who represented 15.4 percent of the city's Hispanic population.

Volunteer Day

The [Jewish Council of Yonkers](#) held its annual appreciation event honoring more than 120 volunteers who have "mentored" in the SMART (Students and Mature Adults Read Together) program for five years or more and the SWEETHEARTS (volunteers who have referred other volunteers) on Wednesday at Temple Emanu-El, on Rumsey Road in Yonkers.



The SMART program brings adult volunteers into the public schools to work one-on-one with students who are reading below grade level. It is currently utilized in 33 schools in Yonkers, Mt. Vernon, and Elmsford. Here, Legislator Jose Alvarado and I enjoy a snack with one of the volunteers.

The annual event is normally billed as their Valentine's Day Tea, but was postponed due to inclement weather this year.

Entertainment was provided by the Yonkers High School Step Team who are very well- known in the community for their lively performances at rallies, events and competitions.

If you or anyone you know is interested in volunteering, please contact the Jewish Council at 914-423-5009.

Council Recognizes Crime Prevention Week



On Tuesday, the City Council issued proclamations to Field Intelligence Officers Det. Edward Pollick, Det. Daniel Treacy and Det. Anthony Amodeo of the Yonkers Police Department .

These officers and Commissioner Edmund Hartnett were recognized by the Exchange Club of Yonkers a few days earlier at a dinner that also featured the marriage of long-time Yonkers residents Majed and Cathy Samarneh by Judge Tom Daley.

There will be an affordable housing expo at the Westchester County Center in White Plains on March 8 from 10am-3pm. The target audience is first time homebuyers and households who are struggling with mortgage payments. For more information, contact Westchester Residential Opportunities, Inc. at 914-428-4507 x 303 or visit them on the web at expo@wroinc.org.

email: chuck.lesnick@yonkersny.gov

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